



Land managers and woodland creation: Values, objectives, and decision making

Forest Research has been researching land managers' values and objectives for many years. We know these factors help shape how land managers make decisions about land use (e.g. [Dandy 2012](#), [Lawrence et al. 2010](#)). With growing pressures on land in Great Britain (e.g. for food production, energy production, housing development, and environmental protection and regeneration), it is increasingly important to understand how land managers navigate land use decisions. Doing so can help ensure policies better align with what land managers care about or can flag where they may meet resistance. This In Brief introduces readers to our latest work with farmers and woodland owners, covering topics such as trees on farms, natural colonisation, and green finance. By highlighting the key messages across four related projects – and pointing to examples from the outputs – it provides a starting point for readers wishing to delve deeper into the evidence.

Values and objectives can influence whether and how land managers decide to create woodland

Land managers are more likely to create woodland when it aligns with their existing values, goals, and land management objectives. Our research helps uncover where this may be the case and flags where it may not.

- Some of our [green finance for woodland creation](#) case studies demonstrate how land managers' values and objectives shape their approaches to woodland creation and their preferences for and relationships with (potential) funders.
- Many [tenant farmers](#) take on a tenancy because 'they want to farm'. Their objectives are focused on food production rather than growing trees (p. 17).
- Our work on [farmers' values](#) shows how and where growing trees on farms can align with the things farmers care about (e.g. where trees contribute to livestock health or environmental objectives).
- For some land managers, [natural colonisation](#) offers a preferable woodland creation method as they value the 'nature-led' approach (p. 5).

A range of values and objectives are important

The [British Woodlands Survey](#) has consistently highlighted the range of objectives motivating woodland owners and noted that financial gain is not a top priority for most woodland owners. Our research shows which values and objectives are likely to motivate land managers.

- When researching [farmers' values](#), we found seven thematic areas that influence farmers' willingness to grow trees. Some of the most important values relate to themes of farm health, farm business, and environmental values.
- Our [green finance](#) case studies found that woodland creators are variously motivated by environmental, commercial, public amenity, and private amenity objectives.

Key terms

Values: An expression of what people consider to be good or important in life.

Natural colonisation/regeneration: Woodland creation through natural processes (e.g. from existing seed).

Green finance: Environmentally targeted sustainable finance.

Find out more

- [Tenant farming](#)
- [Green finance](#)
- [Farmer values](#)
- [Natural processes to create woodland](#)

The relationship between values and behaviour is complex

Behaviour does not always reflect values. Factors including personal circumstances, finances, and the influence of others may shape land managers' behaviour.

- Most research indicates that values change little over time (Schwartz, 1992). However, land managers may reappraise how their land management practices relate to their values. Our [case studies](#) of farmers who have substantially increased tree cover provide a rich insight into the paths they have taken to doing so. They show how events or influences (such as meeting certain people, engaging with organisations, or seeing other farming practices) can lead farmers to rethink their management approaches. In these case studies many of the farmers have moved away from intensive agriculture to more extensive or regenerative approaches, including growing trees.
- Land management decisions may involve multiple stakeholders, but these stakeholders' values and objectives do not always align. For example, on [tenanted farms](#), farmer and landlord may have quite different values and objectives, although both have a stake in how the land is managed. In our [farmer values research](#), we've explored how other people (including family, other farmers, and agents or advisors) influence decisions.

Understanding values offers opportunities to improve engagement with land managers

If land managers feel that creating woodland is consistent with their own values, they may be more inclined to do so. Understanding values can also help ensure communication is framed in language that feels relevant and meaningful. Our research demonstrates the risks of using terminology that is not well-received by land managers.

- The [farmer values](#) work demonstrates that providing credible evidence in suitable formats may help convince farmers that growing trees can help achieve their objectives (e.g. improving crop or livestock health, or providing environmental benefits such as creating wildlife habitat).
- Our research on using [natural processes to support woodland creation](#) found that 'The terms "natural colonisation", "natural regeneration", and "rewilding" lack clear formal definitions, so their use is often ambiguous, and they can create both positive and negative reactions among land managers with different values and objectives' (p. 7).
- Our [green finance work](#) also highlighted the importance of language, noting that 'inconsistent and contested definitions can shape perceptions of risk, trust, and market accessibility' (p. 3).

References

- Dandy, N. (2012) *Understanding Private Land-manager Decision-making: A Framework for Forestry*. Forest Research.
- Lawrence, A., Dandy, N. and Urquhart, J. (2010) *Landowners' attitudes to woodland creation and management in the UK: A review of current evidence*. Forest Research.
- Schwartz, S. H. (1992) 'Universals in the content and structure of values: Theoretical advances and empirical tests in 20 countries', *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 25, pp. 1–65.

What can the evidence map tell us?

Our [systematic evidence map](#) codes woodland creation evidence by land manager objective. It shows relatively more evidence existing for some objectives than others. These include conservation, social/recreational, timber production, biodiversity, improvements to landholding or enterprise, and landscape improvement.

It also codes evidence for the drivers of woodland creation, with many publications discussing land manager attitudes and values.

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To find out more about this and related research, visit our [research page](#).

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